Community Leadership: What Does it Take to See Results?

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Abstract

If your community is looking for more committed and competent leaders, what type of educational intervention will get the best results? U-Lead, the University of Minnesota Extension's community leadership program, engages with organizations and communities to strengthen leadership. As the educational provider of U-Lead, Extension has a responsibility to provide quality programs as well as honor time and resource constraints. The primary question of this study is: what impact, if any, does the program duration have on participant outcomes? Key Observations include (a) the longest duration programs consistently had the most improvements in skills and knowledge, (b) after completing programs, more people are committing to leadership positions. This does not appear to correlate to program duration, (c) using evaluation data for modifying programs and starting additional programs leads to more significant participant change, and (d) community leadership theory and measurement can lead to better programs with greater results.

Background

The University of Minnesota Extension has implemented leadership programs for over two decades. Our programs were "locally grown and named." In 2002, we created a program profile of eight existing programs and did an evaluation of program graduates. We worked with Dr. Kenneth Pigg, University of Missouri, and replicated a retrospective community leadership research study previously conducted in Missouri. Our key findings were consistent with those of the Missouri study measuring significance on 43 specific individual outcomes clustered around five factors (Winchester, 2004).

We launched U-Lead in 2003 to brand all of our leadership programs for greater

visibility. This brand was chosen to indicate that the University of Minnesota (U) has a role with the leadership program (Lead) to differentiate it from other providers. The U-Lead brand also allows for quality indicators, statewide marketing and program reporting.

The purposes of U-Lead programs are to generate competent and confident leadership and informed action on public issues. U-Lead programs are designed to provide resources and opportunities that:

- Foster commitment for leadership roles.
- Enhance the competency of leaders.
- Strengthen organizations and communities.

Commitment is measured by graduates taking on leadership roles after the program. Competency is measured by increases in individual skills and knowledge and five factors (pre- and post-program).

Educators and a steering committee develop a series of learning events for participants. The steering committee and staff must consider:

- Accessibility for learners.
- Availability of resource people.
- Number of educational goals to be reached.
- Resource commitment (time, money, etc.).

As programs begin we find a common tension negotiating the duration of the program and providing a strong rationale for duration. In Minnesota, programs range from five months to two years. In the Missouri study it appeared the indicators of program type and design (by county) were not well related to program outcomes" (Pigg, 2001). The National Impact Study of Leadership in Extension (19913) suggested that focused, in-depth programs18 months or longer were transformational.

The analysis described in this paper was done to inform the question "What impact, if any, does the program duration have on participant outcomes?" In practical terms, what are the differences in short, medium and long duration programs? Duration is the combination of educational contact time and time span. Data from 286 graduates of eight programs is analyzed to better understand: program profile, commitment to leadership positions, skills attained, and behavioral changes (labeled Phase 1). Subsequent evaluation of programs is also reviewed for recommendations (labeled Phase 2).

Theoretical Base

The theoretical base of U-Lead is informed from four arenas: successful communities, community leadership practice, leadership development frameworks, and educational approaches. Below is a brief summary of each of these arenas.

Successful communities have strong leadership. A number of state and national studies have documented the connection between successful communities and leadership practices. The pattern is clear that successful communities are more intentional about (Wall & Luther, 2005; Green, Flora, Flora & Schmidt, 1998; Flora, 1999; National Commission on Civic Renewal, 1998; Mathews, 1996):

- Building and transitioning leadership over time.
- Allowing & supporting many people to be in leadership functions including women, young people, newcomers to the community, etc.
- Having places and spaces for new leaders, emerging leaders, mid-career leaders and retiring leaders to learn and contribute.
- Utilizing the assets of the local people to create a better community.
- Focusing on leadership for the whole community as well as leadership within the parts of the community (business sector, organizations, etc.).

Figure 1
U-Lead intervention
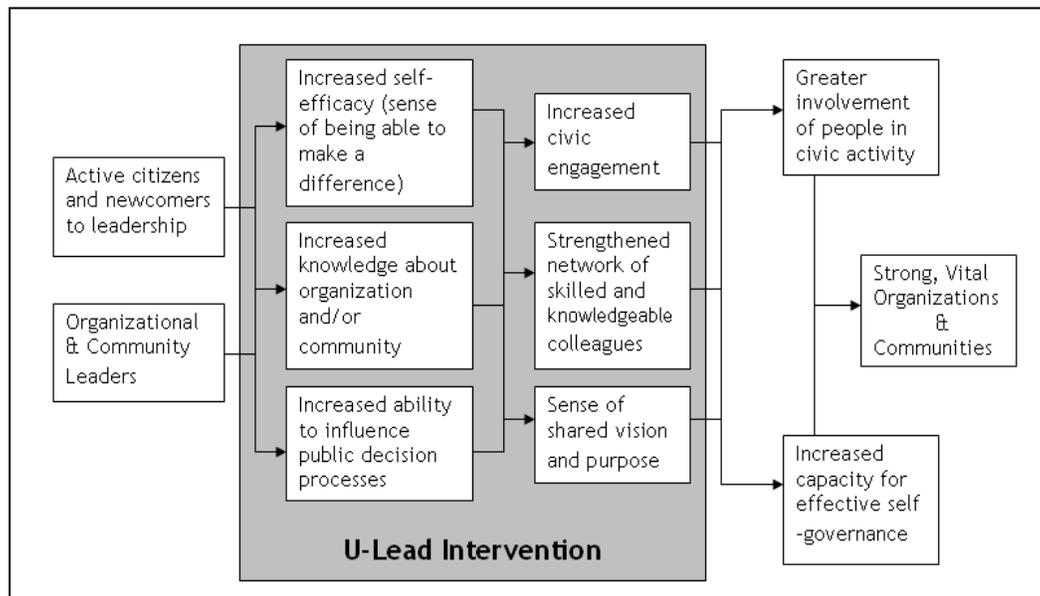
Scheffert (2004) adapted from Pigg (2001)

Community leadership practice theory and evaluation has been pioneered by Ken Pigg (2001). In summary, participants are new, active and/or established community members and/or leaders. Community members are involved in an intervention (community leadership program). This results in greater involvement and better self-governance for stronger organizations and communities.

The U-Lead evaluation measures changes, if any, of involvement and governance capacity. Both elements are measured with a pre and retrospective survey. Current work is underway to more systematically capture organizational and community outcomes.

Five factors are measured in U-Lead programs:
- **Civic engagement** – increased, effective civic participation.
- **Personal growth and self-efficacy** – greater sense of being able to make a difference.
- **Community commitment** – strengthened commitment and network to make their organization effective and/or their community better.
- **Community knowledge** – greater knowledge of assets, needs, resources and policy options.
- **Shared future and purpose**-stronger sense of a shared vision and purpose.

Leadership development frameworks have blossomed over the past three decades. The core of our theory is from the University of Minnesota. The Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs launched the Reflective Leadership Center in 1983. Scholars include Robert Terry (*Authentic Leadership*, 1993; *Seven Zones for Leadership*, 2001), John Bryson and Barbara Crosby (*Leadership for the Common Good*, 1991), and related field books including *Leadership: Sustaining Action on Community and Organizational Issues* co-authored by Donna Rae Scheffert (1993) and *Leadership for the Common Good CD-Rom* (2004). The Center for Integrative Leadership, the Public and Nonprofit Leadership Center, and Extension Community Vitality, Leadership and Civic Engagement Area all contribute knowledge to U-Lead. We also utilize the *Encyclopedia of Leadership* to stay current about leadership research.

U-Lead core educational modules include:
- Leading in the 21st Century.
- Building Exceptional Personal Leadership.
- Making the Most of Your Team.
- Functioning Committees and Public Boards.
- Cultivating Civic Leadership.

- Navigating Conflict and Communication Challenges.
- Stimulating Visionary Leadership.
- Enhancing Ethical Leadership.
- Leading for the Common Good.

Educational approaches must also be wisely constructed. U-Lead is grounded in an educational theory of Transformative Education emphasizing the importance of reflection, critical thinking, creating a community of knowledge, a safe learning environment, and participant responsibility. Mezirow (1978), Boyd, (1988), and Cranton, (1994).

Our community leadership development programs have these elements:
- Program decisions to be influenced by a local planning committee.
- Concentrated and extensive learning opportunities via cohort.
- Learning is based on adult learning models and active participation.

Other educational recommendations come from numerous studies of leadership programs, for example, the book *Building Leaders* by Jay Conger and Beth Benjamin. Twelve best practices were recommended based on evaluations and reviews of leadership education programs.

Intended Audience

U-Lead programs are for:
- Local government officials and employees.
- Appointed and voluntary committees and ad hoc task forces of local government.
- Groups associated with community institutions.
- Neighborhood groups and associations.
- Coalitions addressing local problems or mobilizing local assets.
- Special interest groups and organizations.
- Private sector civic oriented agencies-private, nongovernmental, nonprofit.

Methods

Donna Rae Scheffert, Leadership Development Specialist, University of Minnesota, conducted the study with cooperation of local educators and Stuart Macdonald, research assistant. Ben Winchester was the lead data analyst, Center for Small Towns, University of Minnesota. A retrospective (post/pre) written survey was mailed to participants in 2002. The research survey was developed by

Ken Pigg, University of Missouri and had been done in Missouri. The response rate, corrected for unreachable subjects, was 42%. A second survey was done with additional graduates (2002-2004). The survey instrument was shortened following a factor analysis. The response rate was 95%. The survey instrument is now used routinely with cohorts: a pre-test and a post/pre-test following program graduation.

Results to Date

Six questions are analyzed in the following section to inform the question: what impact, if any, does the program duration have on participant outcomes? They include:
- What is the profile of the participants and program features in Phase 1 (1997-2002) programs?
- Did participants gain knowledge and skills during the program?
- Does the duration of the program affect the number of significant factors achieved?
- Did participants completing programs commit to leadership positions?
- To what extent are these patterns replicable over time (Phase 2)?
- To what extent can program improvements (duration and focused) impact outcomes?

Each question includes a table, observations, and if relevant, recommendations for program organizers and staff. The table to refer to is indicated right below the question. The observations are conclusions drawn from the data. Recommendations are brief notes to program staff and educators about how to obtain and use the data.

Question 1: What is the profile of the participants and program features in Phase 1 (1997-2002) programs? (see Table 1)

Observations:
- Programs range in length from five months to 18 months.
- Educational days range from 10 half-days to 53 full-days.
- Gender overall is similar to the Minnesota population (with greater variation by program).
- Participants are twice as likely as the general population to have college degrees.
- Household income of participants is average to above average.

Recommendation:
- To gather this information, ask participants to complete a pre-assessment at the first session and use the learner demographics to refine educational program.

Table 1
Participant profile of extension leadership program graduates

Program Label Survey Response Number	Program Time Span	Program Contact Days	Gender	College Education	Household Income over $50K
A n-23	18 Months	53 Days	81% Male	65%	52%
B n-24	18 Months	16 Days	73% Male	67%	55%
C n-65	5 Months	9 Days	57% Female	54%	50%
D n-19	9 Months	9 Days	63% Male	73%	75%
E n-15	9 Months	6 Days	73% Male	65%	66%
F n-19	9 Months	9 Days	63% Male	73%	75%
G n-13	15 Months	10 Half Days	n/a	n/a	n/a
H n-16	13 Months	8 Days	n/a	n/a	n/a
Overall n-182	n/a	n/a	58% Male 42% Female	59%	59% over $50,000
Census Avg. MN.	n/a	n/a	51% Female	27%	$53,869 (2003)

Note: For analysis purposes, the following labels will be used in regard to educational contact time:
        Long Programs – A and B   (53 and 16 days)
        Medium Programs – C, D, F   (nine days)
        Short Programs – E, G, H   (less than nine days)

> The program codes are consistent (same program) in the charts of this paper. The charts indicate in what year the program was implemented (same program, new learning group).

Question 2: Did participants gain knowledge and skills during the program? Note that a four-point Likert scale was used. The gap between before and after ratings is noted. (see Table 2)

Observations:
- Survey showed changes on 70 individual items with the longer duration programs showing more items as significant.
- Long programs resulted in significant changes of 76-77% of the 70 items with an average of +76.5%.
- Medium programs resulted in significant changes of 23-67% of 70 items with an average of +45%. The great range between programs is notable.
- Short programs resulted in significant changes of 30-46% of 70 items with an average of +36%.

The items below are illustrative of the 70 questions within the survey. Those items noted below had the most change across all programs Winchester (2004)

Top Questions Ranked by Largest Mean Change	Change
1. I have knowledge of local, county and state resources.	.78
2. I improved my public speaking skills.	.65
3. I think I am better informed about public issues and government than most people.	.62
4. I articulate a convincing vision for the future of my community.	.53
5. I know how to change things in my community.	.51
6. I understand how new ideas are adopted in my community.	.49
7. I try to increase analysis and reasoning skills.	.48
8. I feel I could do as good a job in public office as most others.	.48
9. I know the difference between management and leadership.	.47
10. I work at developing new leaders within my community.	.47
11. I actively express my ideas and opinions about my community.	.47

Table 2
Significant change in individual measures

Leadership Program	Length of Program	Number of Questions out of 70 with more than 0.5 change on a 4 pt. scale/Percent of total
A	Long	53 / 76%
B	Long	54 / 77%
C	Medium	43 / 61%
D	Medium	16 / 23%
F	Medium	36 / 51%
E	Short	21 / 30%
G	Short	32 / 46%
H	Short	24 / 34%

Question 3 –Does the duration of the program affect the number of significant factors achieved? Note that individual items were submitted to a factor analysis to see how items might be related to each other. Five conceptual "factors" were measured. (see Table 3)

Observations:
- The longer duration programs had the highest number of changes in the five factors (.52-1.14).
- Medium duration programs (.13-.80) had mid-level change.
- Short duration programs (.08-.71) had great variability.
- Civic engagement and shared future and purpose were high in most programs.

Recommendations:
- Long and medium programs are more likely to achieve all five outcomes.
- Medium and short programs appear to achieve some of the outcomes, not all of them.

Table 3
Community leadership factor increases by program (1997-2002)

	Length	Civic Engage-ment	Community Commitment	Community Knowledge	Personal Growth and Self Efficacy	Shared Future and Purpose
A	Long	1.14	.59	.56	.65	.92
B	Long	.71	.57	.52	.73	.69
C	Med	.62	.48	.44	.50	.65
D	Med	.45	.25	.39	.33	.43
E	Short	.28	.23	.38	.36	.38
F	Med	.80	.13	.40	.59	.54
G	Short	.75	.46	.62	.46	.46
H	Short	.71	.08	.31	.31	.45
Avg.		.68	.35	.45	.49	.57

Question 4: Did participants completing programs commit to leadership
　　positions? (see Table 4)

Observations:
- Increases in one or more leadership positions after the program range from +10% to +45%.
- The programs enrolled about 50% or more who were already in leadership positions. After a program about 75% had a leadership position (+25%).
- The greatest changes occur in programs when the incoming participants have fewer leadership positions.
- There does not appear to be a relationship between program duration and commitment to leadership positions.

Recommendation:
- During the first session, ask for participants to document existing roles. Documentation about leadership roles pre and post allows analysis of changes in number of leadership positions, change in levels (from local leader to state or national leader) and movement from active to leader.

Table 4
Change in leadership positions after U-Lead

Program (Length)	Percent Of Group With Leadership Positions Before (One Or More)	Percent Of Group With Leadership Positions After (One Or More)	Change
A - Long	48%	70%	+22%
B - Long	14%	59%	+45%
C - Medium	57%	80%	+23%
D - Medium	72%	83%	+11%
E - Short	46%	67%	+21%
1997 - 2002	48%	70%	+22

Question 5: To what extent are these patterns replicable over time? (see Table 5)

Observations:
- The same pattern is replicated (longer programs have higher gains).
- The longer duration programs had the most improvement in the five factors (.34-1.14).
- Medium duration programs (.11-.52) had mid-range change.

Table 5
Community leadership factor increases by program (2004-2005)

	Length	Civic Engagement	Community Commitment	Community Knowledge	Personal Growth and Self Efficacy	Shared Future and Purpose
A	Long	1.14	.78	.71	.94	.83
A	Long	1.04	.72	.79	.88	.82
B	Long	.62	.39	.34	.63	.48
C	Med	.49	.29	.43	.31	.44
C	Med	.45	.25	.39	.33	.43
D	Med	.20	.13	.52	.19	.11

Question 6: To what extent can program improvements (duration and focused) impact outcomes? (see Table 6)

Observations:
- Program D had modest changes in earlier evaluations. Program improvements increased learning of participants in all factors.
- Program C had medium outcomes previously and a more focused approach with educational activities supporting the five outcomes made dramatic increases.

Recommendation:
- Using the evaluation data to change the program duration or add focus to activities toward the preferred outcomes can result in significant learning improvements.

Table 6
Community leadership factor increases by program (2005-2006)

	Length	Civic Engage-ment	Community Commitment	Community Knowledge	Personal Growth and Self Efficacy	Shared Future and Purpose
D	More Focused and Longer	.46	.56	.74	.25	.77
C	More Focused	1.03	1.15	1.19	1.16	1.07
I New Program	Medium and Focused	.65	.56	.53	.37	.59
J New Program	Medium and Focused	.63	.51	.59	.42	.88

Limitations/Conclusion

Limitations of the study include:
- Outcomes are based on self-reporting.
- Programs had various Extension educators as lead instructors.
- Specific program goals may not align well with U-Lead.
- There was not a common curriculum used.
- Programs had various features such as opening retreats, field trips, and individual and group projects.
- The 1997-2002 study was "raggedly longitudinal "(over a period of up to four years after graduation).

Program length does matter. The longer the program, the more skill and knowledge outcomes can be expected. The long programs produced significant results on all five factors and improvements on 76% of the measurable items. Medium length programs achieve some outcomes although not significant on all five factors. Our findings replicate the recommendation from the *National Impact Study of Leadership in Extension* (1993) suggesting that programs 18 months or longer were transformational.

All leadership programs are highly likely to increase the number of graduates committing to leadership roles. Those programs that begin with fewer people in leadership roles show the greatest increase in leadership activity following the program. The duration of the program does not appear to correlate directly with leadership commitment following a program.

Using evaluation data to make program improvements appears to work. Both adding to the duration and focusing educational activities more toward desired outcomes increased participant learning. New programs can be started with knowledge about duration and focus.

Educators implementing community leadership education should utilize tested theory (Pigg, 2001). A normative theory will improve the scholarship base and lead to program improvements in community leadership development programming.

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Biography

Donna Rae Scheffert is a leadership development specialist with Extension's Community Vitality unit, a teaching specialist at the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, a faculty member of the Center for Integrative Leadership and principal investigator for Horizons: Community Leadership for Poverty Reduction at the University of Minnesota. She received the highly competitive 2002 Distinguished Extension Campus Faculty Award from U of M Extension. Scheffert, who joined Extension in 1981, was cited for consistently providing outstanding contributions to programs on campus and across the state. Scheffert is recognized for her ability to develop educational processes that honor diverse viewpoints, respect various learning styles and fully engage learners. She is also a valued coach to colleagues. Co-authored products include: Leadership for Sustaining Action on Community & Organizational Issues field book by the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development, Enhancing Ethical Leadership curricula by the National Association of Family and Consumer Education, and Facilitation Resources, by the University of Minnesota Extension Service.